CHAPTER 9

Kinship, Family, and Marriage

Learning Objectives

- Define the key anthropological concepts related to kinship.
- Describe ethnographic examples of the global diversity of kinship formations.
- Assess how ideas of kinship are shaped by the nation-state.
- Analyze how globalization is reshaping global expressions of kinship.

"I'm Alan. I'm 27. I'm a sperm seeker." Zhang Alan (an alias), who lives in the Chinese capital, Beijing, is unsure about marriage but would like to have a child. As an unmarried woman, however, she is barred by the Chinese government from accessing the nation's sperm banks. Instead, she made a video about her search for a sperm donor and posted it on the Internet. A number of men responded positively, but Alan eventually chose a friend to be her donor (Zhang 2019).

For more than forty years, China's government has sought to define the family by carefully controlling who can have children and how many they can have. Large extended families have long been central to Chinese culture, serving as an economic engine as well as providing intergenerational support for children and the elderly. But in 1980, faced with a population boom that threatened economic growth, the Chinese government sought to orchestrate a cultural shift by implementing a "one child per

family" policy. All families, whether urban or rural, rich or poor, would be strictly limited to one child. Government-sponsored neighborhood committees enforced these mandates with peer pressure, government agencies imposed economic fines, and state-run companies and schools withheld job opportunities, health care, and education from those who transgressed. Some local officials resorted to more draconian enforcement measures, including sterilization campaigns and forced abortions.

In 2016, faced with imminent population decline, the Chinese government fully reversed its one child per family policy. Estimates suggest that by 2100, China's population of 1.4 billion will be reduced by almost half. In May 2021, new government regulations allowed all married couples to have three children per family. But over the course of the one child policy, smaller families became the norm in much of China. More educated women are now delaying marriage and having fewer children. Increasing wealth has reduced reliance on children as a source of retirement support. State policies have led to a culture shift that new policies are not likely to alter.

Despite the state's urgent moves to incentivize more births, it still preserves certain restrictions on the family form by privileging married heterosexual couples. It provides access to reproductive technology, improved maternity leave, and workplace protections for expectant mothers—but only to couples within state-approved family structures. Unmarried couples, single parents, and same-sex partners are excluded from these benefits. Single women, like Beijing's Zhang Alan, are barred from accessing reproductive technologies such as sperm banks, in vitro fertilization, and freezing eggs, and thus they are left to organize their families outside the approved policies of the state.

Zhang Alan's story and her experience of trying to form a family in China raise key questions about our most important human relations, relations that we sometimes call "family" and that anthropologists have explored under the category of kinship. What is a family? Who is "related" to whom? Who decides? Is kinship biological or chosen? What are the relationships between systems of power, like national governments, and the family?

Humans live in groups. As a species, we rarely live alone or in isolation. Kinship is perhaps the most effective strategy humans have developed to form stable, reliable, distinct, and deeply connected groups that can last over time and through generations.

kinship: The system of meaning and power that cultures create to determine who is related to whom and to define their mutual expectations, rights, and responsibilities.

Kinship is the system of meaning and power created to determine who is related to whom and to define their mutual expectations, rights, and responsibilities. Of course, humans also form groups through work, religion, education, and politics. But families and kinship networks provide a unique system of support and nurture, ensure reproduction of the next generation, protect group assets, and influence social, economic, and political systems.

Many people in Western cultures assume that kinship groups have a biological basis and arise around the **nuclear family** of mother, father, and children. But when we examine these assumptions in a cross-cultural context, they show themselves to be a Euro-American ideal that not even those cultures have realized. Kinship groups come in a variety of shapes and sizes: We trace our connections through biological ancestors. We create kinship relations through marriage and remarriage. We adopt. We foster. We choose families of people who care about us. Sometimes we even imagine everyone in our nation to be part of one big kinship community.

nuclear family: The kinship unit of mother, father, and children.

In the twenty-first century, we are vividly aware of new forms of family life as kinship relations shift, closing off familiar patterns and opening up new ones. The image of a mother, father, and two kids gathered around the dining room table every evening for a home-cooked meal and conversation may be familiar as a cultural icon, but for many people, the experience of family is more complicated. Families are made, taken apart, reconstructed, and blended. Gay and lesbian couples and their families are achieving increased acceptance and official recognition. New reproductive technologies—including artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy—continue to stretch our ideas of kinship and families by showing how human culture, through science and technology, is shaping biological relationships.

Although the term *kinship* may be unfamiliar to you, the subject material is not. Through kinship studies, anthropologists examine the deepest and most complicated aspects of our everyday lives—our relationships with the people who are often closest to us, including our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents, cousins, husbands, wives, partners, and children. These are the people we live with, eat with, count on for support, and promise to take care of when they are in need. We pour our emotions, creative energy, hopes, and dreams into these relationships. Many of the most emotionally vibrant moments of our lives—from joy and love to anger and pain—occur at the intersection of individual and family life: birthdays, holiday celebrations, shared meals, weddings, illnesses, and funerals. Through kinship, we see our lives as part of a continuum. We look back to see the history of the people we come from, and we look ahead to imagine the relatives and families yet to be.

At the same time, kinship is deeply intertwined with forces beyond the everyday activities of family and home. In our families, we also learn basic patterns of human behavior—how to treat one another, how to act in groups, how to navigate differences of age, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. This enculturation shapes our lives outside the household, including the ways we think about gender roles, the division of labor, religious practices, warfare, politics, migration, and nationalism. Because cultural norms, values, and social structures are always evolving, kinship and family also become places

of contestation, experimentation, and change that reflect and shape debates within the larger culture.

The study of kinship is one of anthropology's unique innovations for thinking about how culture works. In this chapter, we will explore the following questions about kinship:

- How are we related to one another?
- Are biology and marriage the only bases for kinship?
- How are ideas of kinship linked to the nation-state?
- How is kinship changing in the modern world?

We will examine the many strategies people use to form kinship groups, and we will consider the implications of kinship's changing expressions in the twenty-first century. By the end of this chapter, you should be ready to interpret your own family tree—not just by creating a list of relatives but also by considering how those ties are formed and what role your kin play in shaping who you are as an individual and as a member of society. You will also be prepared to understand and analyze how debates about kinship shape important aspects of our individual and collective lives locally, nationally, and globally.

How Are We Related to One Another?

» Define the key anthropological concepts related to kinship.

Who are you related to? As we saw in Chapter 5, all humans are closely related genetically, sharing more than 99.9 percent of our DNA. Despite this close biological "kinship" among all humans, closer to home we tend to organize our personal relationships more specifically through systems of common biological descent, marriage, love, and choice. As you will discover throughout this chapter, cultures organize kinship relationships in a variety of ways. Some will be familiar to you, and others will not. All are equally valid.

Descent

descent group: A kinship group in which primary relationships are traced through certain consanguineal ("blood") relatives.

One way that humans construct kinship groups is by tracking genealogical descent. In **descent groups**, primary relationships are with certain consanguineal relatives (what U.S. culture refers to as "blood" relatives). These would include your mother, father, sister, brother, grandparents, children, and grandchildren as well as your uncles and aunts who are your parents' siblings—but not your uncles and aunts who are married to your parents' siblings. Descent groups are often imagined as long chains of connections from parent to child

What does a descent group look like? (*Left*) The Pham family gathers with Xuyen Pham (*Far right*), from whom they are descended. (*Right*) A Bush family portrait at the White House, 2005, including, seated from right, then governor of Florida Jeb Bush, former U.S. president George H. W. Bush, and, fourth from right, then president George W. Bush.

that reach back through many generations to a common ancestor or group of ancestors and forward to imagined future generations.

Early anthropological studies through the mid-twentieth century assumed the descent group to be central to the social structure of most nonindustrial cultures outside Europe and North America (Evans-Pritchard 1951; Fortes 1949; Malinowski 1929, 1930; Radcliffe-Brown 1950). Anthropologists of that period expected to find extended descent groups that stretched back over many generations and worked together. Such groups were considered key to understanding each culture's economic, political, and religious dynamics because of the way kinship was understood to be a foundation for other large social networks extending beyond the immediate family into all aspects of cultural life. We will consider one classic example, the Nuer, later in this section.

In contrast, most European and North American cultures do not use descent to organize social groups. Although we may keep track of our ancestors over a few generations, we do so bilaterally—through both the mother's and the father's relatives—and we have generally not constructed large social networks based on kinship connections. In the United States, the Rockefeller, Kennedy, and Bush families might loosely qualify as descent groups. They stretch back over a few generations, tracing roots to a much more recent common ancestor (either John D. Rockefeller, Joseph Kennedy, or Prescott Bush), and although they are now subdivided into smaller segments, they still maintain strong enough connections that they sometimes function together on common economic, social, political, or ritual activities and projects. But such descent groups are extremely rare in North America.

Anthropologists distinguish two types of descent groups: lineages and clans. **Lineages** can clearly demonstrate genealogical connections through many generations, tracing the family tree to a founding (apical) ancestor. **Clans** likewise claim connection to a founding ancestor, but they do not provide the

lineage: A type of descent group that traces genealogical connection through generations by linking persons to a founding ancestor.

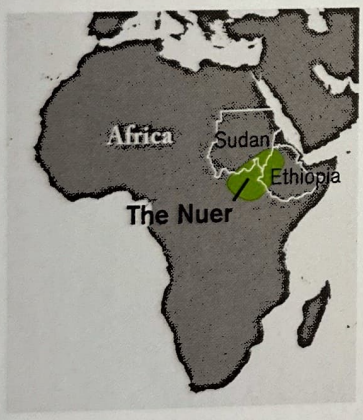
clan: A type of descent group based on a claim to a founding ancestor but lacking genealogical documentation.

same genealogical documentation. Descent groups may be *matrilineal*, constructing the group through female ancestors, or *patrilineal*, tracing kinship through male ancestors. Both matrilineal and patrilineal patterns reflect *unilineal* descent because they build kinship groups through either one line or the other. In contrast, *ambilineal* descent groups—including Samoans, Maori, Hawaiians, and others in Southeast Asia and the Pacific—trace kinship through both the mother and the father. This alternative pattern is sometimes called *cognatic* or *bilateral*.

Most people in the world practice patrilineal descent to formally track kin group membership. At the same time, many people, for practical reasons, still build kinship networks bilaterally through both parents, even when tracing descent unilineally. Are you aware of how your own family traces descent?

The Nuer of Southern Sudan The Nuer people of southern Sudan in northeast Africa constitute a classic representation of the descent group. British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard studied this group in the 1930s (Evans-Pritchard 1951). At the time of his research and until the later part of the twentieth century, the Nuer were primarily a pastoral, cattle-herding people that moved between settlements throughout the year to adapt to rainy and dry seasons. The Nuer were a **patrilineal descent group**: Both boy and girl children were born into the group, but membership could only pass to the next generation through the sons who inherited membership through their fathers. Nuer clans were *exogamous*—meaning that marriages within the group were not permitted. Large clans were divided into lineages, although lineages were extensive enough to spread over several villages.

patrilineal descent group: A kinship group in which membership passes to the next generation from father to son.

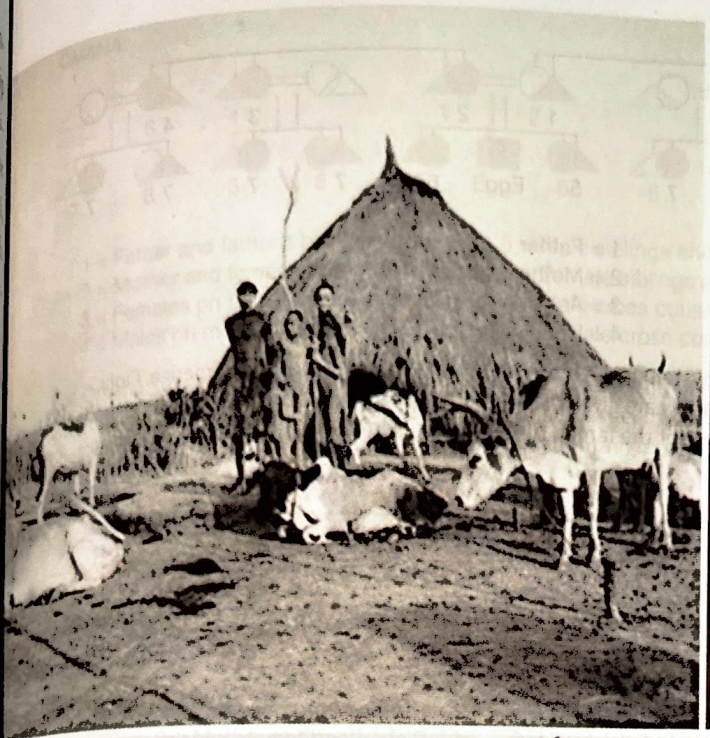


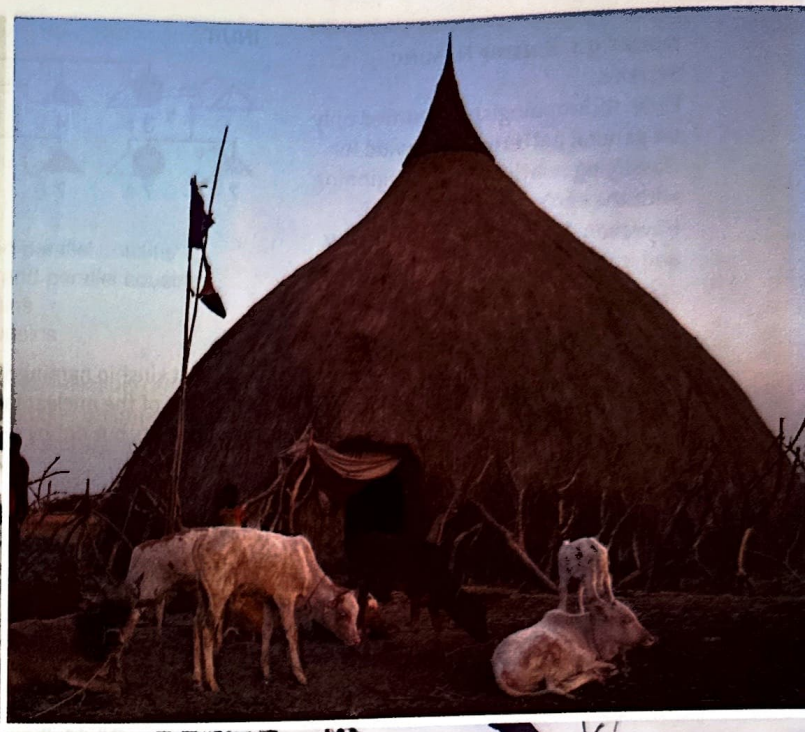
MAP 9.1
The Nuer Region of East Africa

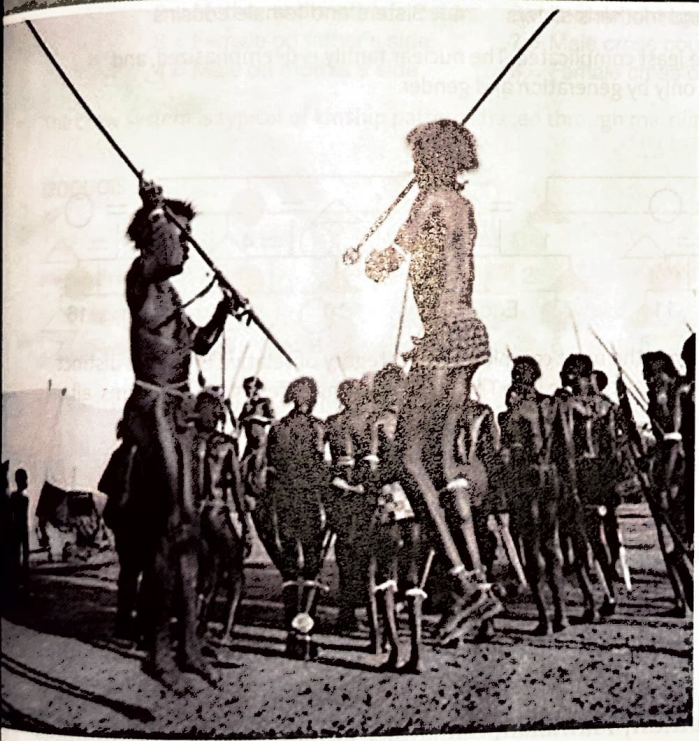
Cattle were the center of Nuer economic life. They were owned by men, but they were milked by women as well as by boys who had not yet reached the age of initiation into the descent group. A successful marriage proposal often required the groom to provide cattle in exchange for the bride.

The patrilineal kinship structures of clans and lineages provided the primary structure for Nuer political and economic activity. In the villages, the lineages collectively owned land, fisheries, and pastures. Ceremonial leadership of Nuer group life was organized under sacred ritual leaders, but these individuals did not control the social networks built around kinship and cattle, so they were not the driving force in Nuer culture (Stone 2009).

Searching for Kinship Patterns As early anthropologists gathered kinship data from cultures worldwide, they developed a limited number of general categories that facilitated comparison. Across vast geographic distances and language differences, only four primary systems were identified to classify relatives in the parental generation: *lineal*, *bifurcate merging*, *generational*, and *bifurcate*





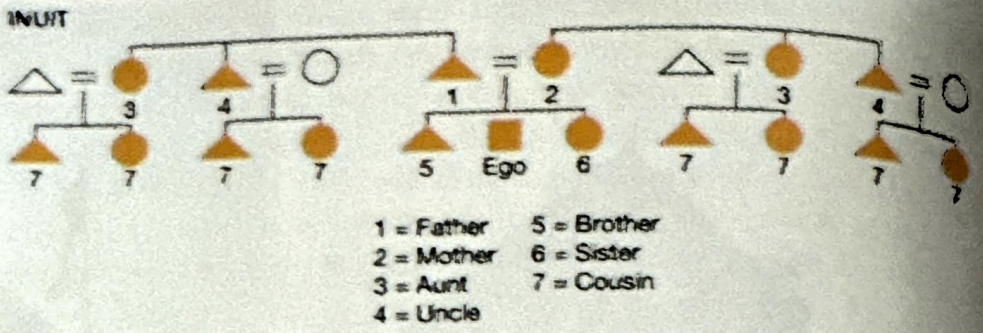


The Nuer of Sudan are a classic representation of a descent group. (*Top left*) A Nuer man, his sons, and cattle outside the family homestead, 1930s (photo by E. E. Evans-Pritchard). (*Top right*) A Nuer family homestead, 2007. (*Bottom left*) Nuer men leaping (beside Evans-Pritchard's tent) in a dance that often took the form of mock battles between village groups. Dances accompanied marriages and provided courtship opportunities for Nuer youth. (*Bottom right*) Nuer women dancing at the bride's family homestead at a contemporary Nuer wedding.

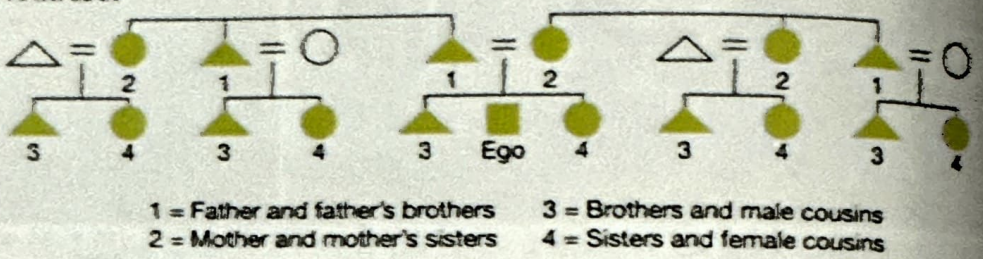
FIGURE 9.1 KINSHIP NAMING SYSTEMS

Early anthropologists identified only six general patterns worldwide for classifying relatives when beginning with the ego's generation: Inuit, Hawaiian, Sudanese, Omaha, Crow, and Iroquois.

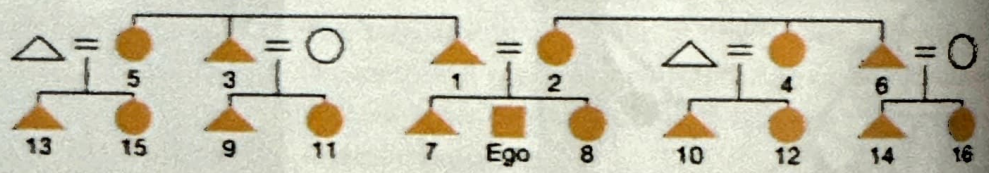
Source: Dennis O'Neil, "Kin Naming Systems: Part 1, The Nature of Kinship," http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_5.htm.



The Inuit kinship naming system is the most common in Europe and North America. Only members of the nuclear family are given distinct terms. Aunts and uncles are distinguished from parents but not by side of the family. All cousins are lumped together.



The Hawaiian system is the least complicated. The nuclear family is deemphasized, and relatives are distinguished only by generation and gender.

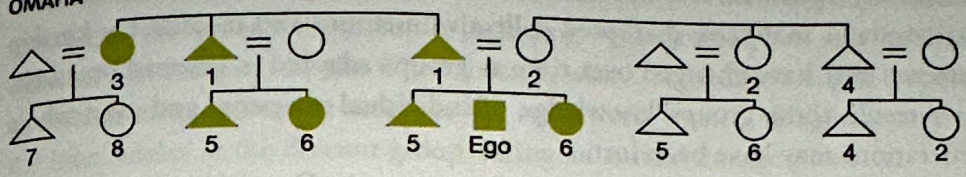


The Sudanese kinship system is the most complex. Each category of relative is given a distinct term based on genealogical distance from ego. There can be eight different cousin terms, all of which are distinguished from ego's brother and sister.

collateral. When beginning with the ego's generation (the ego being the central character and starting point in tracing kinship relationships—for example, you in your own family tree), anthropologists found only six different ways of organizing relatives, in which the variation centered on the classification of siblings and cousins. Each of these six were named after a key group in which the pattern occurred: Inuit, Hawaiian, Sudanese, Omaha, Crow, and Iroquois (Figure 9.1).

Generalized systems of kinship classification can be very useful for identifying and comparing broad patterns of social structure. But anthropologists have found that actual, local kinship patterns do not always match the generalized models. The ways in which human groups trace connections between generations—in other words, how they construct genealogies—can

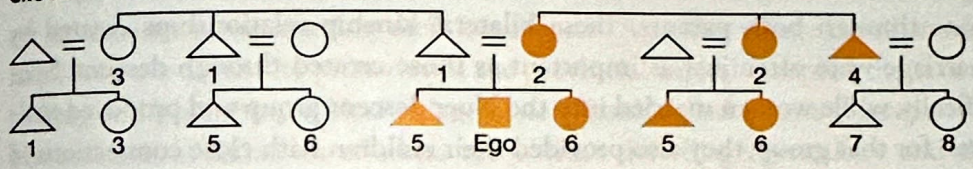
OMAHA



1 = Father and father's brothers
2 = Mother and female on mother's side
3 = Females on father's side
4 = Males on mother's side
5 = Male siblings and parallel cousins
6 = Female siblings and parallel cousins
7 = Male cross cousins
8 = Female cross cousins

The Omaha, Crow, and Iroquois naming systems trace kinship through unilineal descent—either patrilineally or matrilineally—so distinguishing between cousins takes on importance. The Omaha system is typical of kinship patterns traced through patrilineal descent.

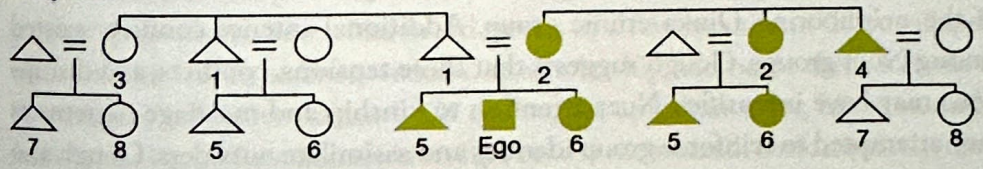
CROW



1 = Father and father's brothers
2 = Mother and mother's sisters
3 = Female on father's side
4 = Male on mother's side
5 = Male siblings and parallel cousins
6 = Female siblings and parallel cousins
7 = Male cross cousins
8 = Female cross cousins

The Crow system is typical of kinship patterns traced through matrilineal descent.

IROQUOIS



1 = Father and father's brother
2 = Mother and mother's sister
3 = Female on father's side
4 = Male on mother's side
5 = Male parallel cousins
6 = Female parallel cousins
7 = Male cross cousins
8 = Female cross cousins

The Iroquois kinship system can be traced either matrilineally or patrilineally. Note the same term is used for father and father's brother and for mother and mother's sister, reflecting shared membership in lineages.

be messy and far from exact. Genealogies are full of gaps, interruptions, disruptions, uncertainties, and imagined or assumed connections. Some groups have extensive genealogies, but even these carefully constructed records may be partly mythical and based on limited recollections or partial history. In contrast, other groups have extremely shallow genealogical memories that span only two or three generations. Segments of these descent groups may no longer live together or act together. Other relatives may have been forgotten or excluded from the main line through conflict. Political, economic, and/

or military upheaval, colonial interventions, and the establishment of modern nation-states may have disrupted collective memory and records. Or kinship patterns may have changed over time as groups adapted to external pressures. As a result, these groups' knowledge of individual ancestors and even whole generations may have been lost.

Once again, the Nuer are an excellent example. Despite representing one of the six key cross-cultural variations in kinship studies (Sudanese), their day-to-day kinship practices did not exactly match the clear patrilineal descent model that might be imagined on a Nuer family tree. Evans-Pritchard determined that the Nuer inherited formal group membership through patrilineal descent, but he and Kathleen Gough (1971), who revisited the study a generation later, found that most Nuer individuals continued to trace kinship relations through both parents. These bilateral kinship relationships created by marriage were often just as important as those created through descent. Specifically, while women married into the Nuer descent group and produced children for that group, they also provided their children with close connections to kin on the mother's side, particularly the mother's brother. This pattern often occurs in patrilineal groups.

When Gough revisited Evans-Pritchard's original study, she suggested that local events concurrent with Evans-Pritchard's research may have affected Nuer kinship practices at the time. In the 1930s, the Nuer were resisting British colonial occupation of Sudan. In addition, they were involved in a conquest of the neighboring Dinka ethnic group. Additional intense conflicts existed among Nuer groups. Gough suggests that these tensions, conflicts, and disruptions may have intensified Nuer attention to kinship and marriage patterns as they attempted to reinforce group identity and assimilate outsiders. Gough also suggests that the particular expressions of kinship recorded by Evans-Pritchard may have been adaptations to political and economic conditions rather than an entrenched, changeless kinship norm (Gough 1971; see also Stone 2009).

Kinship, Descent, and Change in a Chinese Village As Gough found in her work with the Nuer, political factors can shape efforts to construct kinship—a pattern I also uncovered in my own research in a Chinese village. When I conducted fieldwork in the late 1990s, I thought I had found a classic, Nuer-style patrilineal descent group. Ninety percent of the men in the village had the surname *Chen* and traced their origins back to the founding Chen—the apical ancestor—whom they believed had settled in the area more than 700 years earlier. The village children, boys and girls, were all named Chen. But the Chen daughters were all to be married out to men in neighboring villages. The Chen men were to marry women from the same neighboring villages, who would then move in with them at home. The Chen family temple was the largest

ancestral hall in the village and served as the center for venerating Chen ancestors. Until the 1960s, village lands, including agricultural plots and fisheries, were held in common by the Chen lineage, which acted like a small corporation. Male elders allocated access to the collectively owned village property to the other males in the descent group during an annual lineage meeting.

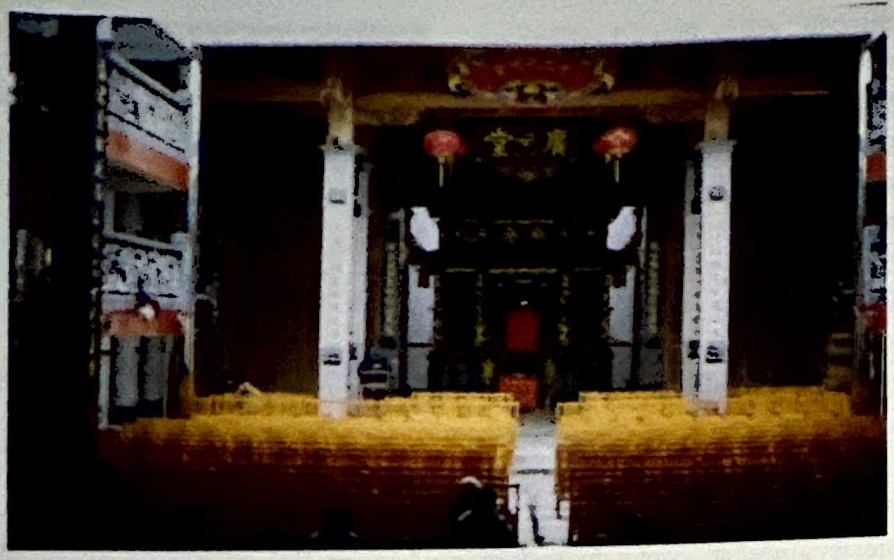
Although the village appeared to be a textbook case of patrilineal descent, kinship is always a bit more complicated and interesting than anthropologists first imagine. In the late 1960s, family and temple ancestral records were destroyed as part of a chaotic and brutal national political movement known as the Cultural Revolution—a modernization campaign promoted by the Chinese government to throw out the old and bring in the new. Only in the 1990s did political and economic conditions improve enough for local villagers to consider reconstructing their lost records. An older village member who had become a university professor in the provincial capital accepted the task of writing and publishing a local village history book called a *zupu* ("gazetteer"). His research included an effort to reconstruct the village genealogy and the Chen line of descent. Funding came from villagers working abroad, particularly in the United States.

MAP 9.2
Fuzhou

When the research was complete, however, the devastating impact of the Cultural Revolution became apparent. Without written records, the reconstructed descent-based genealogy relied primarily on oral histories stored in the memories of village elders. Many vividly recalled their parents' and grandparents' generations. Some had heard stories of a few prominent Chen villagers whose earlier travel, business success, or scholarship had made them famous in the villagers' collective memory. Of course, the apical ancestor, his sons, and a few of their immediate descendants had been remembered. Unfortunately, most of the generations prior to 1900 had been left blank. The genealogical details, if they had ever existed, had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Migration has also challenged the Chen descent group's ability to maintain kinship connections, especially in the context of the current global age. In fact, fully 70 percent of the villagers—most between the ages of eighteen and fifty—have left China since the early 1980s to seek their fortunes in the United States, Japan, South America, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East. Some return to visit their hometown. Most marry and have children in their new host country. According to the rules of the patrilineal descent group, all children born to villagers working abroad still belong in the descent group, and males can pass on that membership to the next generation. But faced with such a massive outmigration and global diaspora of the lineage, how would the Chen descent group keep track of its most far-flung members?

New York is the primary international destination for people from the village. There, with the support of village leaders in China, immigrants have



Chinese family ancestral hall outside Fuzhou, China, built with money sent by villagers working abroad.

created a village hometown association to rebuild and strengthen hometown kinship ties. The association enables villagers to reconnect, provide mutual support, share information, and use their kinship networks to improve their immigrant experience. Association leaders also keep track of fellow villagers, their marriages, and their offspring. They report these developments back to the Chen family elders in China for proper recording. Through this process, long-held village strategies for kinship formation and group building are adapting to the challenges of international migration, spurred by globalization. Modern communication and transportation technologies are enabling Chinese villagers to innovatively extend their notions of patrilineal descent, both spatially beyond China's national boundary and temporally forward into the future.

Certainly, the forces of globalization, including migration and time-space compression, are placing stress on kinship systems worldwide. Members of kinship groups commonly relocate temporarily or permanently to nearby factories or to jobs abroad, seeking improved economic and educational opportunities or fleeing natural disasters and political upheavals. Although the generalized kinship categories developed by an earlier generation of anthropologists have provided insights into broad patterns of kinship, anthropologists who study kinship today confront more fluid, flexible, and creative kinship patterns.

Marriage and Affinal Ties

A second way humans form kinship groups, distinct from descent or consanguineal groups, is through marriage—what anthropologists refer to as **affinal relationships**. Unlike the construction of kinship groups through descent, which links direct genealogical ancestors and descendants, marriage builds kinship ties between two people who are (usually) not immediate biological kin. Marriage also creates a relationship between the spouses' respective kinship groups, called "in-laws" in U.S. culture. The new kinship group created through marriage is linked through affinity and alliance, not through shared biology and common descent.

affinal relationship: A kinship relationship established through marriage and/or alliance, not through biology or common descent.

Something like marriage exists in every culture, but the exact contours and characteristics of these relationships vary widely—so widely, in fact, that it is difficult to say that any one characteristic is universal. **Marriages** create socially recognized relationships that may involve physical and emotional intimacy,

marriage: A socially recognized relationship that may involve physical and emotional intimacy as well as legal rights to property and inheritance.

sexual pleasure, reproduction and raising of children, mutual support and companionship, and shared legal rights to property and inheritance. The bond of marriage may also serve to create connection, communication, and alliance between groups.

Marriages take many forms, including arranged marriages and companionate marriages. **Arranged marriages**, orchestrated by the families of the involved parties, continue to be prominent in many cultures in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa. Arranged marriages are even common among some religious groups in the United States and, in a sense, among some segments of the upper class, who send their children to elite private schools to meet future partners and encourage in-group marriage. These traditional marriages ensure the reproduction and continuation of the kinship group and build alliances with other kin groups. Thus, the couple's parents may view the economic and political consequences of the marriage as too important to be left to the whims of two young people. In this context, marriage becomes a social obligation and a symbol of commitment to the larger kinship group rather than a mechanism for personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Alliance marriages of this sort require extensive negotiation to balance the needs of the group and the intimate personal feelings of the individuals being married. Bonds of affection may develop in an arranged marriage, but this is not the primary goal.

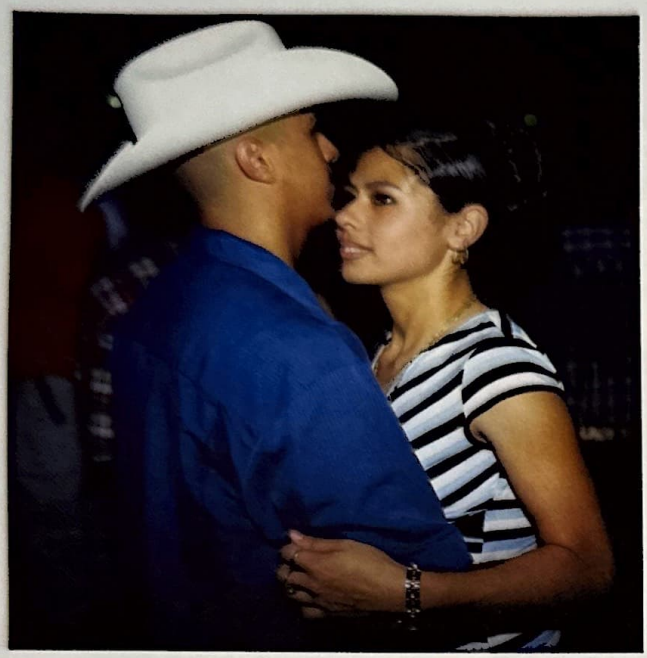
arranged marriage: Marriage orchestrated by the families of the involved parties.

What about Love? Today, marriage patterns are changing rapidly. Younger generations are increasingly thinking of love, intimacy, and personal pleasure—not social obligation—as the foundation on which to build families and kinship relations. Love—and what anthropologists call **companionate marriages**, which are built on love—is the ideal to be achieved (Chan 2006; Gregg 2003; Inhorn 1996; Rebhun 1999; Wardlow 2006; Yan 2003).

companionate marriage: Marriage built on love, intimacy, and personal choice rather than social obligation.

Jennifer Hirsch's (2007) study of love in a small western Mexican town examines the rise of companionate marriage at the intersection of love and globalization. In response to migration, economic exchange, and the time-space compression of communication technology such as telephones and the Internet, love and intimacy are being transformed as globalization links a poor, rural community with its wealthy neighbor to the north, the United States. The population of Degollado, Jalisco—11,612 people according to the 2020 census—varies according to the season. In the spring and summer, many residents migrate north of the border to do agricultural and construction work in the United States. When they return in the winter, they bring back dollars, baseball hats, electronics, and trucks. In a festival atmosphere, young girls promenade around the plaza in the hope of evoking a marriage proposal. "The economy of love is intricately interwoven with the political economy of migration" (Hirsch 2007, 94).

MAP 9.3
Degollado



Young people's ideas about marriage and intimacy in Degollado, Jalisco, Mexico, are shifting under the influence of globalization.

In interviews with the local women of Degollado and those who had relocated to the United States, Hirsch found a distinct shift in the description of marriage. For older women, love came from living well together, and successful marriage involved fulfilling one's roles and obligations: Men brought home the money, and women cooked, washed, cleaned, and raised the children. In contrast, younger women measured a good marriage by its level of intimacy and trust as well as by mutually pleasurable sex. But Hirsch also found that companionate marriage and the emphasis on love do not lessen inequality in marriage or tensions about who earns the money and who gives the orders. Instead, the emphasis on love appears to provide a modernizing sheen that glosses over continuing gender inequalities with sexuality and intimacy.

On a global scale, changing notions of marriage are combining with expanding economic opportunities for women to spur a rapid rise in divorce and marriage dissolution. Melanie Medeiros's (2014) ethnographic study of the small town of Brogodo in the rural interior of Northeast Brazil reveals the local impact of these transformations. Populated by Afro-Brazilian descendants of enslaved people and plantation workers, Brogodo's economy shrank drastically in the early twentieth century because of the decline of the mining industry, leaving residents to rely primarily on small-scale farming and remittances from relatives in urban areas. When the adjacent region was declared a national park in 1985, however, the growing ecotourism industry generated better-paying local jobs—particularly for women, who were recruited to work as receptionists, waitresses and housekeepers. Economic opportunities for men were more limited, as tour guide positions went primarily to bilingual outsiders. Medeiros's survey of local households in Brogodo found that 40 percent of couples were separated or divorced—and 95 percent of those dissolutions occurred at the request of women. Interviews confirmed that women's increased economic independence, combined with shifting expectations about gender roles and marriage, was driving up the rate of marital dissolution in Brogodo.

MAP 9.4
Brazil

Cross-cultural ethnographic research reveals diverse local expressions of companionate marriage but shows that young people around the world are increasingly framing marriage in terms of love, in contrast to the marriage patterns of their parents (Hirsch 2007). Consider for a moment how your own views on marriage compare to those of your parents and grandparents.

Monogamy, Polygyny, and Polyandry Cultural rules, often inscribed in law, may determine who is a legitimate or preferred marriage partner. They may

The Nyimba of Nepal practice polyandry. Here, a woman (*Center*) stands with her two husbands (on either side of her) and her father (*Far left*). Why do different marriage systems emerge in different cultures?

even determine how many people one can marry. Historically, some cultures, such as the Nuer of Sudan or the Brahmans of Nepal, practiced **polygyny**—several marriages involving one man and two or more women. In a few cultures, including the Nayar of India and the Nyimba of Tibet and Nepal, **polyandry** has been common—marriages between one woman and two or more men (Goldstein 1987). Most marriages in the world demonstrate **monogamy**—marriage (usually) between one man and one woman, though, as of 2022, thirty-one countries also legally recognize same-sex marriages, as we will discuss later in the chapter.

polygyny: Marriage between one man and two or more women.

polyandry: Marriage between one woman and two or more men.

monogamy: A relationship between only two partners.

Even where monogamous marriages are the norm, it is common for people to marry more than one person in their lifetime. How does this happen? Marriages may be interrupted by divorce or death. In these cases, individuals who marry again reflect a process called *serial monogamy* in which monogamous marriages follow one after the other.

Incest Taboos Just as some form of marriage exists in essentially all cultures, all cultures have some form of **incest taboo**, or rules that forbid sexual relations with certain close relatives. Such taboos relate to nuclear family members: parents and children, siblings, and grandparents and grandchildren. Incest taboos also affect marriage patterns. A few historical examples of brother–sister marriage exist: among the Inca of Peru, among certain traditional Hawaiian groups, and among ancient Egyptian royalty (perhaps to preserve family control over wealth and power). But these cases are rare. Incest taboos universally prohibit marriage between siblings and between parents and children. But can a person marry a cousin?

incest taboo: Cultural rules that forbid sexual relations with certain close relatives.

Beyond the nuclear family, incest taboos vary from culture to culture. In some contemporary cultures, including parts of China, India, the Middle East, and Africa, *cross-cousins* (children of a mother's brother or father's sister) are preferred marriage partners, but *parallel cousins* (children of a father's brother or a mother's sister) are excluded. Even in the United States, incest rules regarding marriage between cousins vary from state to state. Nineteen states allow *first-cousin* marriages (between the children of two siblings). More distant cousins are not excluded from marriage under U.S. law. No other country in the Western world prohibits first-cousin marriage. Moreover, although it is illegal in the United States to marry a *half-sibling* (a brother or sister with whom one shares a parent), this is not illegal in many other cultures. Can you think of anyone in your family or a friend's family who is married to a cousin?

Even though the incest taboo is universal, its origins are unclear. Some scholars have suggested that the taboo arises from an instinctive horror of sex with immediate family members that developed during our evolutionary history (Hobhouse 1915; Lowie 1920). But studies of primates do not reveal a consistent incest taboo that humans might have inherited (Rodseth et al. 1991). Furthermore, if this instinctive horror existed, then it seems likely that humans would not need to create taboos to restrict incest.

Other theories have addressed the issue from different perspectives. For example, anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski (1929) and psychologist Sigmund Freud (1952) both suggested that incest taboos might have developed to protect the family unit from sexual competitiveness and jealousy, which would disrupt cooperation. However, neither scholar could substantiate this claim with historical or contemporary ethnographic data. Another theory suggests that incest taboos arose out of concern that inbreeding would promote biological degeneration and genetically abnormal offspring (Morgan 1877). However, incest taboos predate the development of population science and the understanding of human genetics.

Even using contemporary genetic information, the science does not support the assumptions behind the incest taboo. For instance, incest does not create defective genes. If a harmful trait runs in the family, systematic inbreeding will increase the possibility of the defective gene being passed along and amplified in the gene pool, but there are few actual historical human examples of this kind of inbreeding over generations. Genetic studies of consanguineous unions (between "blood" relatives) show some increased risk of congenital defects, but only within the studies' margins of error. These risks are actually less than the risk of congenital defects in children whose mothers are over the age of forty, yet this older population is not prohibited from marrying or giving birth (Bennett et al. 2002). Therefore, despite the universal existence of incest taboos, they vary widely in extent, and no consensus exists as to their origins or exact purpose.

Other Marriage Patterns Beyond explicit incest taboos, all cultures have norms about who is a legitimate or preferred marriage partner. In some groups, including most descent groups, marriage tends to reflect **exogamy**, meaning marriage to someone outside the group. Other groups practice **endogamy**, requiring marriage inside the group. Although kin group exogamy is more prevalent, endogamy exists in numerous cultures. It is practiced, for example, within the Indian caste system and within whole ethnic groups, as evidenced by both historical and contemporary U.S. marriage patterns.

In the United States, we practice *kindred exogamy*: We avoid, either by force of law or by power of tradition, marriage with certain relatives. At the same time, we also follow clear patterns of class, race, and religious endogamy. Indeed, most marriages occur between people of the same economic class, the same religious tradition, and within the same race (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). As noted in Chapter 2, interracial marriages were outlawed for most of U.S. history, and only in 1967 did the U.S. Supreme Court rule anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. Although interracial marriage is legal today, intense patterns of racial endogamy continue.

Most monogamous marriages occur between one man and one woman, but there are important exceptions, including female marriage among the Nuer of Sudan and the Nandi of Kenya. Today, same-sex marriage is increasingly gaining acceptance globally, and it is legally recognized in the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Argentina, Iceland, Portugal, Denmark, France, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Ireland, Greenland, Colombia, Finland, Germany, Malta, Australia, Austria, Taiwan, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Switzerland, and Chile. In the United States, as of June 2015, same-sex marriages are legal in all fifty states.

Whether arranged or not; whether monogamous, polygynous, or polyandrous; and whether between people of the same or opposite gender, marriages may be accompanied by an exchange of gifts—most commonly, bridewealth and dowry—used to formalize and legalize the relationship. Though most contemporary Western cultures view marriage as an individual matter entered into by a couple who are romantically in love, in many non-Western cultures, marriages focus on the establishment of strategic alliances, relationships, and obligations between groups—namely, the bride's kin and the groom's kin. Bridewealth and dowry gifts formalize and legalize marriages and establish the relationship between these groups.

Bridewealth—common in many parts of the Middle East and Africa, where it often involves the exchange of cattle, cash, or other goods—is a gift from the groom and his kin to the bride's kin. Often thought of as a means to compensate her family for the loss of the bride, bridewealth agreements also establish reciprocal rights and obligations of the husband and wife, give

exogamy: Marriage to someone outside the kinship group.

endogamy: Marriage to someone within the kinship group.

bridewealth: The gift of goods or money from the groom's family to the bride's family as part of the marriage process.

While interracial relationships are legal in the United States today, intense patterns of racial endogamy (marriage within the same group) continue. Here, Mildred and Richard Loving embrace at a press conference the day after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in their favor, June 13, 1967, in *Loving v. Virginia*, overturning Virginia's laws banning interracial marriage.

legitimacy to their children, and assign the children to the husband's family. Even with the exchange of bridewealth, though, marriages may not always remain stable. Incompatibility, infertility, and infidelity can threaten the marriage agreement and trigger a return of the bridewealth. In this way, bridewealth can stabilize the marriage by establishing a vested interest for both extended families in the marriage's success (Stone 2009).

dowry: The gift of goods or money from the bride's family to the groom's family as part of the marriage process.

Through a **dowry**, the bride's family gives gifts to the groom's family on the occasion of marriage. Common in India, a dowry may be part of a woman's family inheritance that the woman and her new husband can use to establish their household. In many cases, dowries are seen as compensation to a husband and his family for taking on the responsibility of a wife, perhaps because of women's relatively low status in India or because upper-class and upper-caste women are not supposed to work. Today, gifts often include personal and household items. Compulsory dowries are no longer legal in India (since 1961), but dowries are still quite common as part of the public process of transferring rights and legitimizing alliances. In some unfortunate instances where the dowry is considered insufficient, the bride may become the victim of domestic violence. In extreme cases, this may lead to the murder or suicide of the bride, sometimes through bride burning or self-immolation. Such practices have come under severe criticism and are targeted by both Indian and international human rights groups that are committed to protecting the rights and lives of Indian women (Stone 2009).

Are Biology and Marriage the Only Bases for Kinship?

» Describe ethnographic examples of the global diversity of kinship formations.

Cross-cultural ethnographic research reveals diverse strategies for constructing kinship ties that do not involve direct biological connection or marriage alliances. As you will see, the range of strategies underscores the fluid, socially constructed aspect of kinship in many cultures.

Houses, Hearths, and Kinship: The Langkawi of Malaysia

Among Malay villagers on the island of Langkawi, studied by Janet Carsten in the 1990s, kinship is not only given at birth but also acquired throughout life (Carsten 1997). The Langkawi house and its hearth—where people gather to cook and eat—serve as places to construct kinship. In particular, Langkawi kinship is acquired through co-residence and co-feeding. In the local thinking, "blood" is formed by eating food cooked at home. Other bodily substances,

specifically breast milk and semen, are regarded as forms of blood. Thus, a husband and wife gradually become more similar by living and eating together. Sisters and brothers have the closest kinship relationship in childhood because they grow up in the same household eating the same food, but as they marry and move out of the shared home, their "blood" becomes less similar.

The Malay ideal is to marry someone close in terms of genealogy, geography, social status, or disposition. But perhaps because of the Langkawis' history of mobility, as well as the arrival of settlers in their outlying region of the Malay state, local notions of kinship have allowed new people to become close kin by living and eating together. For example, many children in the community have grown up spending significant time in homes with adults other than their birth parents. This fostering has been common for nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and others who are welcomed into the foster family and treated on an equal basis with those born into the family.

In addition, Langkawi understandings of fostering have often included expressions of hospitality in the community, whether one is a short-term or long-term visitor, a visiting student, or a distant relative. Villagers assume that all those who live together and eat together, regardless of their backgrounds, gradually come to resemble one another physically. The ideal guest—successfully fostered—stays for a long time, becomes part of the community, marries a local person, and raises children. In this way, the individual fully enters the kin group. This flexible process has built kinship relations that do not require the connection of biology or marriage. Instead, "[h]ouses and their

MAP 9.5
Langkawi

Among the Langkawi in Malaysia, kinship is created by sharing meals prepared in the family hearth and living together in the same house.

hearths are the sites of the production of kinship" (Carsten 1997, 128; Carsten 2004; Peletz 1999; Stone 2009).

MAP 9.6
London

Cousins by Choice: Asian Youth in Southall, England

Who are your cousins? Are they all biologically related to you? For the youth in Southall, an ethnically diverse suburb of London, England, "cousins" are people you choose. Young people in Southall call one another "cousin" as a way to build strong connections across ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries. These connections enjoy the strength of kinship and friendship combined.

Southall, sometimes referred to as the United Kingdom's South Asian capital, is home to Sikhs (the majority), Muslims, Hindus, Caribbean immigrants, and Whites (primarily Irish). In Britain, these ethnic minority communities are often viewed as distinct groups of people who are essentially the same and who pass down their cultures from generation to generation without significant change. In contrast, Southall youth are creating more diverse, inclusive notions of community, culture, connection, and kinship. According to anthropologist Gerd Baumann, who studied Southall youth in the 1990s, these young people are less locked into the dominant ideas of ethnic, cultural, and religious difference and are more open to the possibility of a connected Asian community. "Cousins are friends who are kin and kin who are friends," said one of the youths Baumann interviewed (1995, 734). A cousin may be related by biology or by choice. Southall youth may encourage their parents to let them go out because they are going out "with their cousins." Or they may line up cousins for protection against possible street violence because family takes care of family. In the process, Southall's youth are expanding the idea of kin across boundaries of religion, ethnicity, and culture.

Youth in Southall, outside London, call one another "cousin" to build connections across boundaries of ethnicity, religion, and race.

Why has the kinship term *cousin* been so successful for constructing kinship ties in Southall? Because *cousin* is common in many of the diverse languages and immigrant cultures represented in the community, Southall residents share some common expectations about what being a cousin means. Biological cousins, like any biological alliances, are not always reliable in times of intense need. So the possibility of adding other, more trustworthy, cousins to one's kinship network is very attractive. And success in constructing cousins has led to further experimentation. In Southall, the power of *cousin* derives from the blurring of kinship and friendship. Kinship carries a sense of obligation and loyalty; friendship affords the power of choice and preference. Together, they

generate a blend of moral expectations that establishes a unique foundation for relatedness. Using the term *cousin* creates an opening through which connections, alliances, and deep relations can be built among people of disparate backgrounds (Helweg 1998; Shaw 1998).

Creating Kin to Survive Poverty: Black Networks near Chicago, Illinois

Kinship can even be a means to survive poverty, as Carol Stack's *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (1974) demonstrates. This ethnography is a classic in anthropological kinship studies. Through deep involvement in an impoverished urban African American community called the Flats in a town outside Chicago, Stack uncovered residents' complex survival strategies based on extended kinship networks.

Although the federal government's 1965 Moynihan Report, titled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," had branded the Black family as disorganized, dysfunctional, and lost in a culture of poverty of its own making (see Chapter 11), Stack found otherwise. She uncovered a dynamic set of kinship networks based on mutual reciprocity through which residents managed to survive conditions of intense structural poverty and long-term unemployment.

These kinship networks included biological kin and *fictive kin*—those who became kin. They stretched among households and across generations, extending to include all those willing to participate in a system of mutual support. Members provided child care. They loaned money to others in need. They took in children who needed a foster home for a while. They borrowed clothes. They exchanged all kinds of things when asked. They cared for one another's sick or aging family members. Despite survival odds stacked against them in a community with few jobs, dilapidated housing, and chronic poverty, residents of the Flats succeeded in building lifelines for survival through their extended kinship networks (McAdoo 2000; Taylor 2000).

MAP 9.7
Chicago

For another look at Black women's strategies for establishing kin relationships, see "Anthropologists Engage the World" on pp. 340–41.

How Are Ideas of Kinship Linked to the Nation-State?

» Assess how ideas of kinship are shaped by the nation-state.

References to the nation often invoke powerful metaphors of homeland, motherland, fatherland, and ancestral home, effectively entwining notions of kinship and family with the power of the nation-state. These concepts evoke ideas of family that can then be used to consolidate political force and build a sense of common nationality and ethnicity. Indeed, Benedict Anderson, in

Dana-Ain Davis
Battered Women and Fictive Kin

Dana-Ain Davis's research in a shelter for victims of domestic violence, recounted in her book *Battered Black Women and Welfare Reform* (2006), offers insights into the creative process that people use to construct fictive kinship relationships during times of need.

"Since most of the women spent up to three months at the shelter, they came to know each other very well, and the relationships they developed lasted well beyond shelter life. Because the escalation of violence in women's lives caused family ties to disintegrate, women . . . attempted to re-create the family that was lost due to violence" (Davis 2006, 154).

Reflecting on her fieldwork, Davis recalled, "Doing research in the battered women's shelter was very intense. But it was amazing to be around people who at least at that moment had made the decision to leave a battering relationship. They were actually feeling phenomenally empowered. But then felt disempowered as a result of their encounter with the welfare system."

Davis's fieldwork took place immediately after the 1996 passage of the U.S. federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This legislation sought to restructure the welfare system by limiting the length of time recipients could receive benefits, imposing stricter conditions for food stamp eligibility, reducing assistance to immigrants, and instituting recipient work requirements. In the case of the shelter women, these policies were applied without regard to their experience of violence and abuse, the actual availability of jobs, or the women's efforts to keep their children safe. From Davis's perspective, many of the law's requirements made it more difficult for women in the shelter to access the governmental support they and their families needed. In addition, Davis found that the women experienced a racism deeply intertwined with public welfare programs and in the actions of program administrators. As a result, after experiencing violence in their personal lives, the women felt they faced a kind of structural violence—violence enacted by the welfare system and its staff. Confronted by these conditions, women turned to the construction of fictive kin to create their own social safety net.

"I always think of fictive kinship as rooted in Carol Stack's work. But I also experienced that process in my own life, having 'sisters' and 'aunts' and 'uncles' who became part of my extended family, people for whom there were mutual obligations. The battered women actually had a structure of who could be who in their networks. People employed at the shelter became uncles and aunts. By naming them that, they then did things that were against shelter rules, including going to people's houses, babysitting their kids, doing stuff for them. When they left the shelter, women named other women in the shelter 'sister.' They informally adopted other people's children. The relationships came with mutual obligations for food, money, and services. Some women couldn't afford to get a phone when they moved out to their own apartments.

"But another woman would get the phone, and someone who was her 'sister' could use that phone number when looking for a job. They were constantly negotiating

Anthropologist Dana-Ain Davis

kinship relationships. They were also negotiating psychological reparative relationships because of the violence and disconnections they had experienced."

Reflecting on her intimate work with women in the shelter during her research, Davis remembered, "There were people I helped individually. I bought food. I went with women to social services. I used my knowledge about human rights violations to urge women to file human rights complaints when they were experiencing what they perceived as demoralizing forms of structural violence when they went to the welfare office.

"What I found so fascinating was the things that women expected me to do as a result of their perception of my power. In fact, I did have more power than they did. Informants are pretty savvy. They know the research world and they wanted me to tell people stuff—meaning policy makers and people who could give the women some immediate relief from their desperation. And they didn't want me to clean it up, which is a slightly awkward and different dilemma.

"One woman was bulimic. She would just stick her finger down her throat to vomit and get people's attention, which she learned to do in foster care when she was being sexually abused. Then she wanted me to go to the department of housing to talk to the director about her bulimia and ask the director to help get her an apartment.

"It's hard to imagine having to go generate the performance of another person's pain. But the women wanted me to translate their experience. I didn't think twice about it at the time. I went right over to the housing department and spoke to the director—who was really quite nice—and I said, you know, this woman, she's going to start gagging and throwing up unless she gets a house. Of course it didn't help her get a house, but I did what she asked me to. It wasn't until I began writing about how desperate the circumstances made these women that I understood more deeply why they were completely fine with the sensationalization of their experiences. It's all about how you manage depravation through revelation. How you tell your story.

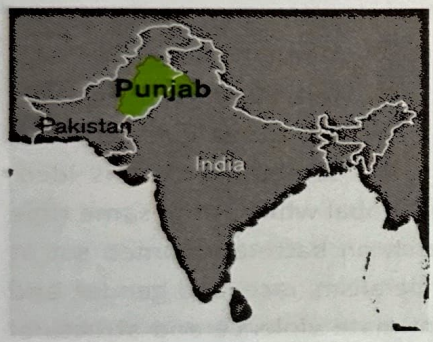
"In hindsight, I would say that I didn't do research on battered women, per se. I would say I did research on neoliberalism [see Chapter 11]. Since the women were experiencing the direct effects of U.S. welfare reform policies, I was really looking at the impact of privatization and neoliberalism through the lens of battered women. I was talking to real people about something that is ideological and economic and global while at the same time very personal. My research on battered women sat at the intersection of neoliberalism, race, and gender, and at the intersection of intimate violence and structural violence."

> *"Anthropology doesn't just help you understand the diversity of the world. It should help you think critically about your own perceptions of the world."*

In talking about what she hopes for anthropology students, Davis said, "I want students to think outside their own boxes. Anthropology has an accumulation of ethnographic data that helps us see things differently. But anthropology doesn't just help you understand the diversity of the world. It should help you think critically about your own perceptions of the world. Every conversation about cultural anthropology needs to work back to the question, 'How do you now interpret yourself and your community's behavior?'"

Imagined Communities (1983), marvels at the ability of nation-states to inspire a common national or ethnic identity among people who have never met, most likely never will meet, and have little in common socially, politically, or economically. Yet many people feel so connected to their country that they are even willing to die for it. How does this idea of the "nation" gain such emotional power? Janet Carsten (2004) suggests that nationalism draws heavily on ideas of kinship and family to create a sense of connection among very different people.

Like membership in many families, citizenship in the nation generally derives from birth and biology. Citizenship may be conveyed through direct descent from a current citizen. Another key pathway to membership in some nations, available to immigrants and other outsiders, is through marriage. Over time, members of the nation come to see themselves as part of an extended family that shares a common ancestry and a deep biological connection. As the boundaries blur among kinship, nationalism, and even religion, these powerful metaphors shape our actions and experiences (Carsten 2004). The next two sections illustrate how experiences related to the concepts of kinship and the nation can differ dramatically from one culture to another.



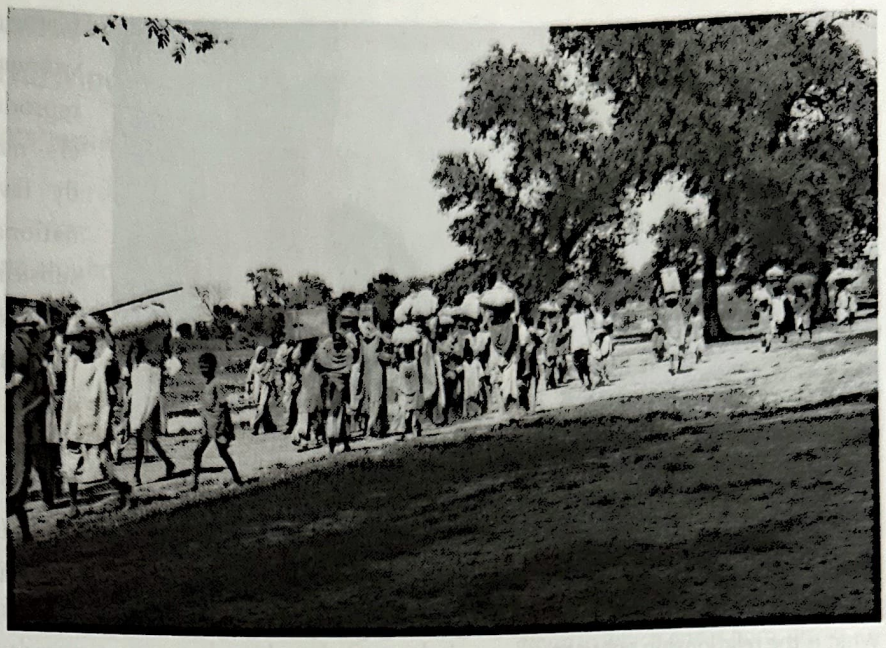
MAP 9.8
Punjab

Violence, Kinship, and the State: Abducted Women in Western Punjab

The relationship between kinship and the nation-state can be highly complex, especially under conditions of violence. Anthropologist Veena Das (1995), known for her work on violence, suffering, and the state, has explored these complicated linkages in the aftermath of the disastrous partition of India and Pakistan in 1946–47. Over the course of fifteen months following partition, widespread violence struck cities, towns, and the countryside. Fanatic Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs carried out kidnappings, rapes, lootings, and other atrocities against members of groups other than their own. More than half a million people were left dead in the name of religion and in the service of patriotic fervor.

Das focuses on the more than 100,000 women who were abducted and the many more who were raped during the mayhem. Their abduction and rape created a moral and practical crisis both for families and for the state. In families of West Punjab, where most of the abuses occurred, kinship norms traditionally placed high values on purity and honor to help regulate sexuality. Thus, women who were violated and abducted during the violence were seen to bring shame on themselves and their families. In fact, Das documents widespread stories, told mostly by men, that honored the memory of women relatives who chose death rather than sexual violation. These women were considered heroic martyrs.

After the conflict, the governments of both countries placed a high priority on recovering the abducted "sisters and daughters" and restoring them to their families of origin. Over several years, however, many abducted women had married, become pregnant, borne children, and even converted to their abductor-husbands' religion. Yet the return of these women and children became a matter of national honor. The Indian and Pakistani governments passed legislation invalidating their marriages and conversions and forced them to leave their new families behind.



Muslims, carrying their possessions, flee India for Pakistan as riots spread following the partitioning of India in 1947.

Despite each state's sense of victory, the women's families of origin did not always share this satisfaction. For example, many returning women were quietly married off to any relative who would take them. Their children—conceived during abduction—were rarely claimed as legitimate kin. Both the women and children were left out of family genealogies and stories.

Overall, the return effort yielded contradictory outcomes. The state celebrated the return of abducted sisters, daughters, and their children as a sign of the restoration of the national family and the fulfillment of its paternal responsibility to protect its family members. But the state's actions conflicted with local kinship norms. Family honor was not restored by the return of the abductees but rather was compromised by the sexual violations these women had experienced. Although the state sought the return of its rightful members as an act of purification to restore national honor, local families, confronting the abducted women's perceived pollution, sought to restore family honor by pushing the women away and silencing their stories. In these contradictory outcomes, we see how kinship can serve as an arena in which other structures of power exert their dominance.

Reproducing Jews: Issues of Artificial Insemination in Israel

In Israel, too, we can see how women serve as key players in defining and maintaining kinship connections and reproducing Judaism and the Israeli nation-state. Susan Kahn's ethnography *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (2000) provides a dramatic example of the powerful intersections among reproduction, kinship, religion, and the state. For

MAP 9.9
Israel

What is the relationship between kinship and the nation-state? A lab technician looks through a microscope while fertilizing egg cells at a fertility clinic in Tel Aviv, Israel.

historical and religious reasons, Jewish women in Israel have felt great pressure to reproduce the family and the nation. Israel's national health policies have heavily favored increased reproduction. The national health insurance, for instance, has subsidized all assisted reproductive technologies, and it does not promote family planning services to prevent pregnancy. Today, the country has more fertility clinics per person than any other nation in the world, and it was the first to legalize surrogate motherhood.

Kahn's study examines a small but growing group of single Jewish mothers who are giving birth through artificial insemination. Because Jewishness passes down matrilineally from mother to child, what happens when a child is conceived through assisted reproductive technologies? These matters are of vital importance to the reproduction of Judaism and the state of Israel and, thus, have been debated intensely by Jewish rabbis and Israeli state policy makers alike. Some scenarios are straightforward. For instance, in the eyes of the Israeli state, any children conceived through artificial insemination and born to unmarried Jewish women are legitimate citizens. The line of descent and religious inheritance through the mother is clear. As evidence, the state provides these unmarried mothers with a wide range of support, including housing, child care, and tax breaks.

But other scenarios spur complex disagreements about religion and nationality. What is the effect on citizenship and religious identity when non-Jewish men donate sperm to Jewish women? Who is considered to be the father—the sperm donor or the mother's husband? When Jewish women carry to term eggs from non-Jewish women, who is considered to be the mother—the donor of the egg or the woman who carries the egg to term? The situation is equally complicated if a non-Jewish surrogate mother carries the embryo of a Jewish woman that was fertilized by a Jewish man through in vitro fertilization.

Much is at stake in these arguments for the Jewish religion and for the state of Israel. Decisions about kinship in these cases of assisted reproductive technologies intersect with heated debates about how Judaism is reproduced and how Israel is populated. In fact, these decisions have implications not only for the Jewish religion but also for notions of ethnic and national belonging and for the pathways to legal citizenship in the state of Israel (Feldman 2001; Finkler 2002; Nahman 2002; Stone 2009).

How Is Kinship Changing in the Modern World?

» Analyze how globalization is reshaping global expressions of kinship.

Kinship patterns are rapidly changing around the world in response to cultural shifts, changing gender roles, new imaginations of marriage, technological advances, and processes of globalization.

The Nuclear Family: The Ideal versus the Reality

The nuclear family concept developed in Western industrialized cultures as families adapted to an economic system that required increased mobility to follow job opportunities wherever they might lead. Though people are born into a **family of orientation** (in which they grow up and develop life skills), when they reach adulthood, they are expected to detach from their nuclear family of orientation, choose a mate, and construct a new nuclear **family of procreation** (in which they reproduce and raise their own children). These "detachable" nuclear family units are extremely well adapted to a culture that prioritizes economic success, independence, and mobility over geographic stability and intergenerational continuity. Anthropologists like David Schneider have shown how this view of the nuclear family has become entrenched as the standard against which to judge other family forms (Schneider 1980).

family of orientation: The family group in which one is born, grows up, and develops life skills.

family of procreation: The family group created when one reproduces and within which one rears children.

Historical studies suggest that the nuclear family's status as the cornerstone of U.S. culture may be more myth than reality (Coontz 1988, 1992). Although the nuclear family came into prominence during a unique period of economic expansion after World War II, it had not played a major role in the kinship history of the United States before that time. The idealized nuclear family of the twentieth century did not exist for the early colonists; it emerged as nineteenth-century industrialization spurred increased mobility by smaller family units and undermined extended family groups. Even at its height in the mid-twentieth century, participation in the nuclear family model was far from universal. It was limited to a minority of Americans, particularly those in the White middle class (Carsten 2004; Coontz 1988, 1992; Stone 2009).

Current kinship patterns in the United States are changing rapidly, just as they are in many other parts of the world. A wide variety of newly constructed family forms and kinship networks are emerging (Figure 9.2). Families are creatively renegotiating kinship after divorce, constructing new relationships to include stepparents, stepchildren, stepsiblings, multiple sets

of grandparents, and extended households of former spouses. Unmarried couples are living together. Same-sex couples are having or adopting children. Families are supplementing biological connections and affinal marriage connections with alternative family forms based on friendship, respect, and mutual support. New reproductive technologies are yielding families of choice through in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, and surrogacy. These patterns reflect new residential and interpersonal relationships that contrast sharply with the imagined privacy and separation associated with the nuclear family ideal.

Chosen Families

In her book *Voluntarily Childfree*, anthropologist Shelly Volsche (2019) considers the growing number of American young adults who have decided to remain child-free. In a culture that places so much importance on reproduction, what does it mean to make a meaningful life without traditional parenthood? Volsche's work reveals the painful experiences of voluntarily child-free young people who confront disapproval, prejudice, and even moral outrage from parents and friends. Meanwhile, they go about constructing families that include romantic partners, friends, and pets, and they meaningfully connect with future generations through mentorship and leadership opportunities. Young women, whose gender identity and social value have long been tied to fertility and motherhood, face particular stigmatization. The young people in Volsche's study reflect on themes of choice, partnership, support, authenticity, autonomy, the desire to nurture, and efforts to leave the world better than they found it. In the process, they offer further evidence of shifting U.S. and global paradigms of kinship and family that include many who are choosing not to be parents.

Kath Weston's (1991) ethnographic study of the construction of gay and lesbian families in San Francisco in the 1980s, *Families We Choose*, revealed how chosen families can take on the characteristics of stability, continuity, endurance, and permanence to become "real" when biological families are inadequate or fail. Not surprisingly, chosen families come in many shapes and sizes. Gay and straight friends, biological children, children adopted formally and informally, and former lovers all can become kin. Close friends can become family. Support networks and caregivers can take the place of biological kin and become kin themselves. In chosen families, love, compassion, and the hard work of care over time make kinship very real (Bolin 1992; Lewin 1992).

Increasingly, people are creating kinship through choice. Here, a gay couple in Chengdu, China, share their home with their adopted son, daughter-in-law, and grandson.

The Impact of Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Discussions of technologies that assist in human reproduction—such as sperm and egg donation, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and cloning—have filled the popular media, religious publications, courtrooms, and legislative halls of government. The emergence of these technologies raises questions about the rights of parents who use them and of children born as a result. Culture, in the form of medical technology, is now shaping biology. The long-term implications of this shift for our ideas and experience of kinship and family are unclear, but they deserve consideration (Franklin 1997).

Reproductive technologies are not new. Most, if not all, cultures have had techniques for promoting or preventing conception or enabling or terminating pregnancy, including fertility enhancements, contraceptives, abortion, and cesarean surgeries. Over the last thirty years, technological innovations have opened new avenues for scientific intervention in the reproductive process and the formation of kinship. DNA testing can now determine the identity of a child's father with remarkable certainty, erasing doubts about paternity. Medical tests can now identify the sex of unborn children, a practice that has become problematic in parts of India and China where a strong cultural preference for male children has led to the early termination of many female fetuses (Davis-Floyd and Dumit 1997). Across the globe, when reproductive technologies become increasingly specialized, the implications for cultural constructs such as family and kinship become progressively more complex.

Families of Same-Sex Partners

Same sex partners and their families have become increasingly woven into the fabric of U.S. cultural norms and values. Television shows and movies routinely include gay characters and their families. Celebrities like Elton John, Jillian Michaels, Niecy Nash, Ricky Martin, Wanda Sykes, Karamo Brown, Alec Mapa, and Neil Patrick Harris raise children with their same-sex partners. The United Methodist Church ordained its first openly gay bishop, Karen Oliveto, in 2016. And when a high school in Louisiana canceled its senior prom in 2010 rather than allow a graduating student to bring her girlfriend as her date, a group of parents organized an alternative prom so the girls could attend.

Still, cultural debates about sexuality and same-sex marriage in the United States are intense and by no means settled among certain segments of the population. Within the debate we can see the contestation of cultural norms and values. Opponents raise concerns that these alternative kinship patterns will cause the breakdown of the traditional family and that the acceptance of same-sex relationships will lead to social disorder.

Drawing on generations of cross-cultural research on kinship, marriage, and the family, in 2004 the American Anthropological Association issued the following statement:

> The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies. (American Anthropological Association 2004)

From a cross-cultural perspective, we see that there is no single definition of marriage, but many. As anthropologist Linda Stone notes, "From a global, cross-cultural perspective, those who seek same-sex marriage are not trying to redefine marriage, but merely to define it for themselves, in their own interests, as people around the world have always done" (Stone 2009, 271).

Transnational Migration, Kin Care, and Aging in Ghana

Today's unprecedented migration flows of people searching for work have spread generations of families across national boundaries and, in turn, affected kinship structures around the globe. Anthropologist Cati Coe's early research, detailed in her book *The Scattered Family* (2013), focuses on the transnational kinship practices of immigrants from Ghana, West Africa, who live and work in the United States. In Ghanaian culture, family strategies of kin care, including care for children and the elderly, have been highly valued. But transnational migration and parenting strategies have forced a reworking of many older patterns. For example, in addition to sending money to support their families back home, many Ghanaians working in the United States also send their young children back to Ghana. To these parents, allowing their children to grow up in the care of grandparents in an extended family environment seems preferable to raising them in a situation characterized by the uncertainties of immigrant sojourns. Physically separated from their children, mothers and fathers working abroad hope that material and financial support will be adequate evidence of their parental love within these transnational families.

In a Ghanaian culture known for its respect of elders, government policy on aging has placed almost exclusive responsibility for the care of the country's senior citizens on family and kin—a policy that has remained constant despite significant shifts in national and global economic and social realities. In recent years,

rural to urban migration within Ghana has made urban centers younger and turned many rural areas into de facto retirement communities. Women are increasingly working outside the household. Longer life spans have meant a reshaping of intergenerational relations as families reorganize to provide synchronized care for children, grandparents, and even great-grandparents, whose lives now intertwine.

Women exercise at a weekly group meeting for the elderly in the rural town of Bankoe, Ghana.

Coe's most recent work, *Changes in Care: Aging, Migration, and Social Class in West Africa* (2019), extends her earlier research to focus directly on the impact of transnational family configurations on the elderly and the experience of aging in Ghana. What happens, Coe asks, when the kinship system of care for frail and elderly relatives is disrupted by transnational migration, particularly when previous economic instabilities and internal migration have already altered these kinship repertoires?

Coe's research brings to light the many creative ways that Ghanaian families and local communities are adapting long-standing familial practices to a contemporary globalized setting. In urban areas, Coe's study finds that wealthy elites and some in the middle class supported by international remittances are fueling the rise of residential nursing homes and commercial care services—an outsourcing of kin care that would have been unimaginable in Ghanaian culture only a few years ago. In more rural areas, families and communities, also sometimes supported by remittances, are creating adult day care centers. These facilities, many operated by local churches, give elders a space to congregate for social interaction, singing, music, and exercise, and they serve as points of contact for those needing additional services like health care. As Coe notes, the transnational parenting strategies of Ghanaians working abroad are not so much undermining long-established family kin care practices as they are contributing to innovations in more traditional practices that have been changing for some time in response to the effects of globalization.

Thinking Like an Anthropologist: Kinship in Personal and Global Perspective

We experience kinship all the time, although we may not use that term to describe it. Kinship is close to home, for it comes alive in the people we live with, eat with, play with. It is vital as we experience the most dramatic periods of our personal lives. You will continue to make kinship and family relationships—perhaps through marriage, having children, and choosing close friends who ultimately become family. Thinking like an anthropologist can help you better understand these experiences. And in today's globally interconnected world, understanding the vast diversity of kinship patterns may help you navigate relationships with classmates, friends, family, and colleagues. As you do so, keep in mind the questions that have guided our discussion in this chapter:

- How are we related to one another?
- Are biology and marriage the only bases for kinship?
- How are ideas of kinship linked to the nation-state?
- How is kinship changing in the modern world?

In thinking about the complex kinship issues described at the beginning of this chapter, how can we apply this chapter's ideas to better understand the situation of families in China and, more generally, any [illegible] changes in the constructs of kin and family? W[illegible] related to whom? Who decides? What role [illegible] state play in defining kinship? Is kinship primarily [illegible] logical, or can family be chosen? Who constitutes [illegible] own family? As you traced your family tree, did you [illegible] that kinship is not only about creating a list of [illegible] but also about understanding the many ways those [illegible] are formed and the role that kin play in shaping you[illegible] an individual and as a member of society? These [illegible] of anthropological analysis will become increasingly important to you as you engage changing concepts of kinship in cultures across the globe during the twenty-first century.

Key Terms

kinship (p. 318)
nuclear family (p. 319)
descent group (p. 320)
lineage (p. 321)
clan (p. 321)
patrilineal descent group (p. 322)
affinal relationship (p. 328)
marriage (p. 328)
arranged marriage (p. 329)
companionate marriage (p. 329)
polygyny (p. 333)

polyandry (p. 333)
monogamy (p. 333)
incest taboo (p. 333)
exogamy (p. 335)
endogamy (p. 335)
bridewealth (p. 335)
dowry (p. 336)
family of orientation (p. 345)
family of procreation (p. 345)

For Further Exploration

Bridewealth for a Goddess. 2000. Directed by Chris Owen, with Andrew Strathearn. Ronin Films. An elaborate religious ritual in the Western Highlands of New Guinea in which men seek protection through marriage to a powerful goddess.

"The Complicated Chinese Family Tree." 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCFRoILS1jY. Humorous YouTube video elaborating Chinese kinship terms in just four minutes.

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